

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please add the following paragraphs to the Specification after paragraph [0023]:

[0023.1] In one embodiment, a method comprises the computer-implemented steps of: receiving trust information defining one or more trusted signatories; receiving configuration information comprising a hostname, one or more configuration directives for a host network element associated with the hostname, and one or more digital signatures of the hostname and configuration directives; attempting to verify the one or more digital signatures based on the trust information; applying the configuration directives to a network element only when the one or more digital signatures are verified successfully.

[0023.2] In this embodiment, the method further comprises the step of: verifying that the one or more digital signatures is valid and that one or more principals respectively associated with the digital signatures have collective authority to perform the directives on the host.

[0023.3] In this embodiment, the method further comprises the steps of: receiving, in association with a particular configuration directive, security information defining a number of required signatures and required principals; applying the particular configuration directive only when the configuration information has the number of required signatures by the required principals.

[0023.4] In this embodiment, the method further comprises the steps of: receiving, in association with a particular configuration directive, security information defining a number of required signatures and required principals; applying the particular configuration directive only when the configuration information has the number of required signatures by the required principals and only upon successively validating all required signatures.

[0023.5] In this embodiment, the one or more digital signatures comprise a first digital signature of a first portion of the one or more configuration directives by a first user, a second digital signature of a second portion of the one or more configuration directives by a second user, and a third digital signature by a third user, wherein the third digital signature is applied to a resultant of the first digital signature and the second digital signature.